



# **Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**

## **MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT**

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, January 31 – February 6, 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2007 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

### **Wolf Monitoring Activities**

Staff are focused on preparing the annual report, though occasionally getting out for snow tracking ground surveys as snow conditions permit.

Final 2008 minimum estimates of the number of wolf packs, total wolves, breeding pairs, the number of confirmed livestock killed by wolves, and wolves killed to address wolf-livestock conflicts will be available in early March 2009 when the 2008 Annual Report is completed and made available to the public. Until then, all media reports of wolves and/or livestock losses should be interpreted with a dose of caution, as numbers provided to the media have been preliminary estimates.

Flights: Laudon flew in northwest Montana on January 29<sup>th</sup>.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices, many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

### **Wolf - Livestock Activities**

Asher strung fladry around a 50-60 acre calving pasture on private land near the north end of the Crazy Mountains.

## **Outreach and Education Activities**

Asher attended the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Group monthly meeting. Lane Adamson and John Crumley with the Madison Valley Ranchlands Group gave an update on the Madison Wolf Range Rider program, among other topics.

On the 6<sup>th</sup>, Sime gave a short presentation and participated in a discussion via teleconference call with graduate students at Oregon State University taking 561 Forest Policy Analysis: The Role of Top Predators in Sustaining Forest and Riparian Ecosystems: Science, Policy, and Politics. The class is being taught by Cristina Eisenberg (a PhD student working on a study “Trophic Cascades Involving Humans, Wolves, Elk, and Aspen in the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem.” Her study area includes the N. Fork of the Flathead River drainage and Glacier National Park) and Dr. Norm Johnson. About 20 people participated.

*Catching up:* On January 29<sup>th</sup>, FWP Region 1 Wildlife Program Manager Jim Williams attended the Lincoln County Commissioner’s meeting. They gave a presentation and discussed the status of big game populations (white-tailed deer especially), wolves, and delisting. About 35 people attended.

FWP announces the availability of a paper which was published in a conference proceedings of the Wildlife Damage Management Working Group of The Wildlife Society. It is entitled “Gray Wolves and Livestock in Montana: A Recent History of Damage Management” by Sime et al. It presents a historical and contemporary look at wolf-livestock interactions and damage management from 1987-2006. It will be available at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/livestock.html>.

FWP also announces the availability of a final report which examines wolf-ungulate interactions and population trends with special emphasis on the Greater Yellowstone Area and Southwestern Montana. It also presents information about wolf-ungulate interactions in Montana from a statewide perspective. It is authored by Ken Hamlin (recently retired FWP Research Biologist) and FWP Researcher Julie Cunningham, with significant contributions from Montana State University professors Dr. Robert Garrott, Dr. Scott Creel, and their students. See: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/game.html>.

## **Research Activities**

Nothing to report.

## **Law Enforcement and Related Activities**

Nothing to report.

## **Other**

### *NEW -- Delisting Update:*

On January 20<sup>th</sup>, as was somewhat expected, the new incoming administration put a “hold” on all new federal regulations that were not finalized and published in the Federal Register as of the 20<sup>th</sup>. The hold affects all federal agencies, all pending federal decisions, all subject areas. This was not a surprise as every new incoming administration for the last 20 years has done similar and put a “hold” on the previous administration’s pending decisions. All new, incoming federal department / agency heads are directed to review rules not yet published and decide what should be done. Options are to approve them and move forward, modify them first and then publish them, or not publish them in order to take a different course of action.

Since the wolf delisting decision (rule) announced on January 14, 2008 was not yet published in the Federal Register, its publication will be delayed while it is being reviewed by new, incoming federal officials. The reviewers will examine the biological data and legal merits of the decision. It is not known how long the review process will take and when a decision will be made. Secretary of the Interior Salazar will make the decision. Additional information about delisting in the northern Rockies is available at the USFWS website:

<http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>.

*Current Management in Montana:*

FWP, through an interagency cooperative agreement, is still the lead agency for all wolf conservation and management (within the bounds of federal regulations) so long as adequate federal funding continues to be made available. FWP will continue to monitor wolves, do public outreach, and guide and direct research activities. No public hunting or trapping is allowed. USDA Wildlife Services is still the agency to investigate causes of injured or dead livestock and carry out FWP's decisions to address conflicts, as guided by federal regulations. Montana will continue to stay involved in litigation and any future delisting developments and will continue to seek the most efficient, successful path to delisting. FWP will also continue its collaborative work with Montana Tribes, other state and federal agencies, and the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program.

Check the wolf pages on the FWP website for important information and updates:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

*Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:*

The terms of several Board members appointed by Governor Schweitzer and selected from the list provided by the FWP Commission expired on January 1, 2009. On January 15<sup>th</sup>, the FWP Commission initiated the nomination process to fill the vacancies. The purpose of the board is to administer programs and funds to minimize livestock losses caused by wolves and to reimburse livestock producers for wolf-depredation losses. Prospective board members must be knowledgeable or experienced in at least one of the following subjects: raising livestock; livestock marketing, sales, or breeding associations; wolf and livestock interactions; wildlife conservation; administration; and fundraising. The addition of fundraising experience to the list of qualifications reflects the board's leading role in generating financial support for the program.

Nominations / letters of interest for the board must be submitted by Feb. 15. Address nominations to Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board Nominations in care of Wildlife Division, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; P.O. Box 200701; Helena, MT 59620-0701. E-mail nominations to FWP at [fwpwld@mt.gov](mailto:fwpwld@mt.gov).

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: [www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf](http://www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf).

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 322-4303. Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.

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